

What is Swine Influenza?

Swine Influenza (Swine flu) is a respiratory virus in pigs that is caused by type A Influenza virus. Swine flu viruses regularly cause outbreaks in pigs causing high levels of illness but low death rates. While swine flu virus may circulate throughout the year, most outbreaks occur during late fall and winter months in a similar pattern as that seen in human influenza outbreaks. The classical swine flu virus (Influenza type A H1N1 virus) was first isolated from a pig in 1930.

Can Humans Catch Swine Flu?

Swine flu viruses do not usually infect humans. Sporadic human infections with swine flu have occurred, usually associated with direct exposure to pigs. From December 2005 to February 2009, only 12 cases of human infection with swine flu have been reported to the CDC. Swine flu viruses have been reported to spread from person to person, but in the past, this transmission was limited and not sustained beyond three people. The CDC has determined that the current swine flu virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. However, it is not known how easily the virus may be spread between humans.

What Are the Symptoms of Swine Flu in Humans?

The symptoms of swine flu in humans are similar to those seen with regular seasonal influenza and include fever, lethargy, lack of appetite and coughing. Some individuals with swine flu have also reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

What is the Treatment for Swine Flu?

There are antiviral medications available that can be used for the treatment of influenza. However, just as with treatment for regular seasonal influenza, the medications work best if started within the first 1-2 days of illness.

How Can Swine Flu Infection be Prevented?

There is presently no vaccine available for the prevention of Swine Flu in humans. The best way to prevent infection is by diligent hand hygiene. Wash hands with soap and water for at least 15 to 20 seconds. If soap and water is not available, an alcohol based hand sanitizer may be used. Alcohol based hand sanitizers may be purchased at most retail stores. If using the alcohol based hand sanitizer, use enough to cover all surfaces of your hands and rub until the product is dry – do not wipe off the product with paper towels. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth as viruses are readily spread in this manner. If you are coughing or sneezing, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue and then throw the tissue in the trash after you use it and then wash or sanitize your hands.

What Should I Do if I Get Sick?

If you become ill with flu like symptoms, you should contact your physician. Your health care provider will determine if testing or treatment is needed. If you are sick, stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others. Remember to cover your mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing. Then wash or sanitize your hands and do so every time you cough or sneeze. Seek immediate medical care if you are experiencing difficulty breathing, or are having severe or persistent vomiting that causes you to become dehydrated.

Can Swine Flu be Spread by Eating Pork?

No. Swine flu is not spread by food. Eating properly handled and cooked pork and pork products is safe. Cooking pork to an internal temperature of 160 degrees kills the swine flu as it does other bacteria and viruses.

How Long Can an Infected Person Spread Swine Flu to Others?

Individuals with swine flu virus should be considered potentially infectious as long as they are symptomatic and possibly for up to 7 days following the onset of illness. Children, especially younger children, may be contagious for longer periods.